

# What to Say During a Mound Visit: A Coach's Script

Fundamentals

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My 11-year-old left-hander had walked three straight batters in the second inning. I called time and walked to the mound, and before I said a word I could see it — shoulders slumped, head down, not making eye contact. His mechanics had been fine in warm-ups an hour earlier. This wasn't a mechanics problem. It was a confidence implosion happening in real time.

The most effective mound visits for young pitchers are short (under 60 seconds), focused on one physical or mental cue, and end with something the pitcher controls — like a breathing reset or a specific spot on the catcher's glove. Don't run a mechanical diagnosis out there. Don't show frustration. And the moment the pitcher makes eye contact and nods, you're done — walk away and let him pitch.

## Why Most Youth Mound Visits Backfire

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Most coaches walk to the mound with good intentions and a mental checklist. Drive leg. Arm angle. Finish through the zone. They want to fix the problem. But in a game, under stress, in front of teammates and parents, a 10-year-old cannot process three mechanical adjustments simultaneously.

Coach Dan Blewett, a former pro pitcher who has become one of the most thoughtful voices on pitcher development, makes a point we have borrowed heavily from: young pitchers already have the drills and the mechanics they worked on in practice. What they are missing in a bad inning is not new information — it is a reset. Handing them five mechanical cues mid-game is like giving a drowning kid a textbook on swimming.

In 20+ years coaching youth baseball — from 7U tee ball through high school — I have watched well-meaning coaches talk their pitcher out of the three outs he had left. The mound visit that runs long, covers multiple mechanics points, and ends with "just throw strikes" is often worse than no visit at all.

## The 3-Part Framework: Breathe → One Cue → Go

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We use a simple 3-part structure for every mound visit, regardless of age or situation.

**Breathe first.** Do not say anything for a beat when you arrive. Put your hand on the pitcher's shoulder — read the kid, some want physical contact, some do not. Give the infield a moment to reset. The silence is itself a signal: *I am calm. You can be calm too.*

**One cue, max.** Pick the single most important thing. Not the three things you noticed. One. It might be a target cue ("pick a spot on the catcher's glove and start there"), a balance cue ("tall and fall"), or a mental reset ("you have thrown this pitch 200 times this week — trust it"). This cue gives the pitcher something concrete to do other than worry.

**End with confidence, then walk.** Close with something true — not false praise, something true. "You have got this. Two more outs." Then walk away. Coaches who linger undermine the visit. Your body language tells the pitcher more about your confidence in him than your words ever will.

## Age-Differentiated Scripts

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This is where most coaching guides fall short. What you say to a 9-year-old is fundamentally different from what you say to a 15-year-old.

### 8U – 10U: Emotion First, Mechanics Never

At this age, the game is about fun and belonging. A young pitcher who is struggling is embarrassed and scared, not mechanically confused. Mechanics conversations under stress go in one ear and out the other.

What to say: - "Hey. Look at me. Take a deep breath with me." (Literally breathe with them — kids follow your body) - "One pitch. Just throw one good one to [catcher's name]. Can you do that?" - "Nobody expects you to be perfect. We just want to see you compete."

What not to say: - "You are overthrowing" / "You are opening up too early" — these are practice concepts, not game-day resets - "Just throw strikes" — they would if they could - Anything with even mild frustration in your voice

### 11U – 13U: One Mechanical Cue Is Fine

At this age, pitchers have done enough drill work to absorb one adjustment into the next pitch. One.

What to say: - "I want you to focus on [one thing]. That is it. Forget everything else." - "Reset your breath. Where is your target?" - "Your stuff is there. Let us get back to what you were doing early."

Effective mechanical cues for this range: - "Glove to the target, then fire" (arm path and front-side focus) - "Hips first" (drive and separation) - "Land and post up" (posture through delivery)

### 14U – High School: Treat Them Like a Pitcher

At this level, your pitcher has a real self-image as a competitive player. Talk to them like one.

What to say: - "What do you feel like you are doing wrong?" (They often know — let them diagnose) - "This hitter has been sitting on your fastball. What do you want to give him?" - "You are fine mechanically. This is the mental game now. Reset."

The biggest mistake I see at the high school level: treating a 16-year-old like a 9-year-old on the mound. They need information and respect, not just reassurance. Ask a question, listen to the answer, give one solution, and walk.

## What to Say Based on the Situation

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The reason for the visit shapes everything you say.

**Lost command (walking batters):** Focus on the target, not the mechanics. "Find your spot on the mitt and throw to that. Nothing else." The instinct is to overcoach. Resist it.

**Getting hit hard:** Check the pitcher's head first. If they are rattled, regulate the emotion before anything tactical. If they are locked in and focused, a pitch-selection shift ("let us go off-speed earlier in the count") can help.

**Visibly scared or anxious:** Drop all baseball talk. "You are fine. Take a breath. Look at me. You have got this — I have seen you make this pitch a hundred times." The nervous system has to regulate before the brain can receive coaching cues.

**Arm fatigue, late in the outing:** Be honest and create safety. "Tell me how your arm feels." Pitchers at every youth level will push through pain because they do not want to disappoint the team. Build an environment where they can be honest with you.

## What NOT to Say on the Mound

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These are things I have been guilty of and had to unlearn over the years.

- **"Just relax"** — signals that their current state is wrong, which adds stress on top of stress
- **"What is going on out here?"** — opens a problem-focused conversation when you need a solution-focused one
- **"We really need this out"** — they know; adding urgency does not add performance
- **Multiple cues in one sentence** — "Keep your elbow up, drive your back leg, and stay closed" is three corrections that will not survive the walk back to the dugout
- **Anything you would be embarrassed for parents to hear** — they are watching and often listening from the stands

The coaches who have the most effective in-game mound visits built the framework *before* the game started. In our program, every starting pitcher gets a short pre-game check-in during warm-ups — nothing formal, two questions:

1. "What is your feel today — good, okay, or rough?"
2. "What is your one cue if you are struggling? What do you want me to say?"

That second question is the one that changes everything. When a pitcher tells you pre-game that "glove to the target" is his personal reset cue, your mound visit takes 20 seconds. The conversation already happened. You are just triggering it.

This connects directly to what Dan Blewett describes in his pitcher development research: each pitcher, through repetitive drill work, builds a set of personal self-regulation cues — a GPS that pulls them back on track without needing new instruction mid-game. We have made this a foundation of our baseball coaching approach at every level. Pitchers who do the pre-game prep are visibly calmer when they see us walking toward the mound, because they know exactly what is coming.

## Running Mock Mound Visits in Practice

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Almost no youth program does this — and it is one of the highest-leverage things we have added to our pitching sessions: we practice the mound visit itself.

Once a month, we run a simulated game scenario. A pitcher throws from the mound while teammates play defense in a live infield simulation. We walk out and run the visit exactly as we would in a real game — real body language, real timing, real words. The pitcher gets used to being coached under simulated pressure. We rehearse the framework. The whole team sees what a good mound visit looks like.

If you are building this into your season schedule, our 12U baseball practice plan shows how we carve out time for scenario-based pitching work alongside fielding and hitting stations.

**Step 1 — Situational Setup (5 min)** Describe the scenario to the infield before throwing starts: "Bases loaded, one out, the pitcher just walked two straight." Have the pitcher throw 3–4 pitches for real. Coaching cue: the more realistic the setup, the more useful the drill — let infielders and the catcher react like a real game so the pitcher feels the pressure.

**Step 2 — Live Mound Visit (2 min)** Walk to the mound exactly as you would in a game. Breathe, deliver one cue, close with confidence, and walk. Time yourself — aim for 45 to 60 seconds total. Coaching cue: narrate your reasoning aloud afterward so pitchers understand the logic behind what you said and what you chose not to say.

**Step 3 — Pitcher Debrief (3 min)** Ask the pitcher directly: "Did that help? Was the cue right for you? Was it too long?" Build a personal vocabulary with each pitcher across the full season. Coaching cue: a cue that unlocks one kid freezes another — this debrief is where you learn the difference for each player on your staff.

**Step 4 — New Scenario (5 min)** Run the drill again with a different situation — arm fatigue instead of command loss, or a confident pitcher who just got hit hard. Practice adjusting your script to the actual reason for the visit. Coaching cue: always ask "How is your arm feeling?" before talking mechanics so you enter the mound conversation with the right information already in hand.

## Building Pitcher Confidence Off the Mound

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The mound visit is the last line of defense. The more you invest in pitcher confidence and self-awareness during practice, the less you will need it. Knowing when to teach youth pitchers a changeup is one piece of that puzzle: when a pitcher has a reliable secondary pitch he trusts, he enters a mound visit with more options and less anxiety about the one fastball that is misbehaving.

For coaches who are still building their overall pitching approach, our guide to coaching youth baseball for beginners covers how to build the trust and communication patterns that make every difficult in-game conversation go better than it otherwise would.

The best mound visit I ever made lasted about 20 seconds. My 13-year-old ace was in trouble in the fourth — a walk, a single, their best hitter stepping in. I walked out, put my hand on his shoulder, looked him in the eyes, and said: "You have been here before. One pitch at a time. Your stuff is good." Then I walked back to the dugout.

He struck out the next hitter on four pitches.

That visit worked because we had built the relationship and the shared language over an entire season. The mound visit is the least important part. What happens in practice, in the dugout, in all the ordinary moments of a season — that is where pitcher confidence is actually built.